

1-1-2014

Agents of Production: Precedent

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Recommended Citation

Gonzalez, Tony (2014) "Agents of Production: Precedent," *Datum: student journal of architecture*: Vol. 5 , Article 13.
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/datum/vol5/iss1/13>

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agents of production

LENS: PRECEDENT

The Gregory Palermo System: Innovation, Impact, Beauty, Zeitgeist And Avant-Garde

In early 2013, a fellow student of Architecture at Iowa State developed a bracket that pit famous architects of various time periods against each other. The bracket was constructed without a value system against which to evaluate these characters. When it was delivered to students and teachers alike, it arrived only with a verbal prompt: "who would win?". Thus, the bracket demanded the user develop their own set of criteria against which to evaluate the various oeuvres. A copy of this bracket was given to every instructor that we could get a hold of, and most were quickly able to produce their own set of criteria to compare the work. Professor Gregory Palermo, demanding order, not only explained his criteria verbally, but inscribed them onto the face of the document such that there could be no question about the metric he would deploy. His inscription read as follows:

Innovation was the key to Greg's system, as each point functions as a unique 'mode' in which newness is manifested. But, in understanding the role of the precedent project, not only must we know what to look for, but how they are executed. Greg's system is important first step to understanding the way that the student of architecture thinks about that ever-present Agent of Production: **The Precedent**.

CRITERIA:


- 1. INNOVATORS RELATIVE TO THEIR TIME: SEEKING NEW DIRECTIONS**
- 2. IMPACT ON OTHER ARCHITECTS: DESIGNERS/ SCHOOLS**
- 3. "BEAUTY" OR OVERALL QUALITY (UNIQUE?): THE AMAZEMENT FACTOR**
- 4. IMPACT ON POPULAR CULTURE**
- 5. EXEMPLARS OF THEIR TIME: ESTABLISHING THE STANDARDS OF SUCCESS OR THE EDGE**



Flexible Relevance Vs. Selective Firmness

Appealing to a set of abstract values clears only the first gate through which the precedent must pass to make the cut as an ideal reference. The project must also be relevant to the problem that the student seeks to solve. This situation, however, conceals a trap. At the time of writing, my own studio project called for the articulation of a tight, 45° triangular site. I begin my research by flipping through the oeuvres of characters that meet the Palermo Criteria. Koolhaas, Siza, and Holl make the top of my list. Holl has an art museum in Helsinki with forms that negotiate an angled site with an attractive gracefulness. At this point in my perusal, the clarity of the concept in the massing, which has to do with the collision of two separate programmatic elements, has me frothing at the mouth with pleasure. I begin racking my brain for ways to bend my own conceptual position into a similar two-form scheme, such that I might imbue my project with the same grace. Conceptually, my project dealt with unifying separate pieces, not dividing them. The clarity of my own idea is muddled by my attraction to a precedent, and the task of solving my problem of the bending site has got me rethinking my core conceptual stance, which would nullify weeks of production. This is an issue of flexible relevance: because the project is a complete product of my consciousness, I am (existentially speaking) free to edit any point of it at any point of its maturity, and I am able to bend my criteria so that a project that I find attractive can influence my own.

If my problem is too much flexibility, I will combat it with firmness. As I move from initial concept drawings to final dimensioned documents, I need a way to immunize my process against the pitfall of flexible relevance, as well as crystalize earlier productions so that I don't lose ground. Like a music playlists, I propose the precedent playlist. It is a framework that structures the process of discovery, rather than a completely rigid list of tracks. Services like Spotify, Pandora, and iTunes Genius



allow us to generate playlists of knowable themes and unknowable content. I begin by assuming that certain architects are more helpful to study at certain milestones in the development of a project. I begin with a highly abstract conceptual notion of the place. In particular, let's say I abstract out physical characteristics of the place, examining only the social and economic condition of the place. I may look to Holl watercolor diagrams for a language to describe these conditions. Next, I begin to selectively lift my veil of abstraction, letting more and more conditions enter my field of vision. As I move forward in this way, I transition from Holl diagrams to Koolhaas notions of program manipulation. Siza-style plan sketches follow, manifesting these ideas in dimensioned, articulated space. All the while I lock down the productions of the previous iteration. In this way, I apply a focused effort, rather than a scattered one. The playlist must be subject to periodic critique and reflection. While I begin by curating the artists that will perform, I must employ a clear value system, and all the while keep constant vigil against the flexibility of relevance.

Final Thoughts

The precedent takes on a special role in our discipline. Because it is impossible to build and iterate in the full-scale, we must study abstractions in order to evaluate our proposals. The precedent, however, proves a complex agent of production. It can be easy to be infatuated by the beauty, or image, of a design, but this distances the designer from the attributes of the work that might be put to work. By deploying an intensely conscious and intentional process, it may be possible for the architecture student to operate more successfully in a world that is hyper-saturated with media. A strong value system must be employed to navigate the seemingly endless ecosystem of precedent work. But, as with all creative processes, this system is itself the subject of critique and iteration. And so we continue our work.

by Tony Gonzalez

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BATTLE

STRUCTURAL 16

ETRUSCAN 8

Frank Lloyd Wright

FACADE 4

Michael Graves

HELSINKI

Santiago Calatrava

Sverre Fehn

BARCELONA

Louis Sullivan

Jean Nouvel

PARIS

Richard Neutra

Peter Zumthor

SHANGHAI

Eero Saarinen

Alvaro Siza

BERLIN

Philip Johnson

Tadao Ando

BUENOS AIRES

Paul Rudolf

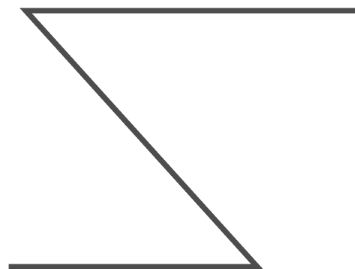
Antoni Gaudi

CHICAGO

Peter Eisenman

Louis I. Kahn

CHAMPIONSHIP



ROYALE

STRUCTURAL 16

ETRUSCAN 8

FACADE 4

Le Corbusier

Zaha Hadid

VALENCIA

Bernard Tschumi

Rem Koolhaas

STOCKHOLM

Carlo Scarpa

Richard Meier

NEW YORK

Walter Gropius

I.M. Pei

ROME

Mies Van Der Rohe

Norman Foster

FLORENCE

Marcel Breuer

Frank Gehry

ST. PETERSBURG

Renzo Piano

Moshe Safdie

LONDON

Oscar Neimeyer

Alvar Alto

AMES